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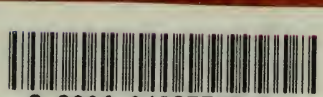

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THE

MORAL AND RELIGIOUS INFLUENCES OF AUTUMN.

A SERMON,

In Three Parts,

PREACHED IN SAINT ANDREW'S CHURCH,

MONTREAL,

("In the Fall of the Leaf,")

1849,

BY ALEXANDER MATHIESON, D. D.

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1850.

TO

THE ELDERS AND CONGREGATION

OF

St. Andrew's Church, Montreal,

THE FOLLOWING

SERMON,

ORIGINALLY ADDRESSED TO THEM, AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,

IS, WITH SENTIMENTS OF SINCERE GRATITUDE AND ATTACHMENT,

RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED,

BY THEIR AFFECTIONATE PASTOR.

121246

The following Sermon was written, and delivered on three several Sabbaths, in the ordinary course of ministerial duty, without the remotest view to its publication. The author is not aware that he has presented any thing new upon the subject; or that he has clothed his views in a more attractive garb than others, who have treated the same subject, have presented theirs. He is, therefore, disposed to ascribe the serious impressions, which, (with much satisfaction he has learned,) the discourse made upon the minds of many who heard it delivered, to the sympathy of their feelings with the pensive aspect of *that* season—the moral and religious influences of which it was designed to illustrate,—than any merit in itself. These impressions, it is his duty, as it is his earnest desire, to deepen and perpetuate. In the hope, that the publication of the discourse, with the blessing of of God, may contribute to effect this end, he cheerfully complies with the solicitations of several who heard it preached, to present it to the public, even though it be in the imperfect form in which it was originally delivered.

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SERMON.

Isaiah lxiv, 6.—"We all do fade as a leaf."

Of the many emblems which nature presents of the frail and fading condition of man, there is not one that more strongly appeals to our feelings, or gives a more correct and impressive representation of human life, than the faded and falling leaf. In the season of the year, when the rich foliage which gave loveliness and shade to the sultry summer's day, assumes a yellow tinge—when the plants, and shrubs, and flowers, which adorned the fields, decay—when the leaves begin to drop, one by one, from the boughs—when "nature's choristers" are silent in the groves, and the woods echo the melancholy plaint of the sobbing winds,—when the light and the heat of the sun are diminished, and over the face of nature is shed the stillness of repose,—we are forcibly reminded of the mutability of our condition here below. The characters of melancholy beauty and decay are diffused over the whole scene, which we cannot fail to associate in our imaginations with the calm loveliness of declining years, and the decay of human life.

In all ages, and in all nations, the beautiful similitude in our text, has forced itself on the observation of man, and has been employed by the Poet

to adorn his pages, and by the Moralist to give point to his instructions. And how forcibly does it speak to us in a language that cannot be misunderstood, of the time when we too must decay and sink into the ground. We cannot contemplate the leaves "now green in youth, now withering on the ground," without thinking of the countless generations of men that have successively appeared in the world, and have passed away,—without feeling, that we too are dying creatures in a dying world,—without perceiving, that the spring-time and summer of our days, rapidly, but insensibly, usher us into "sere and yellow-leaved autumn", when the genial current of life begins to dry up—when the pleasures and pursuits of the world no longer kindle our enthusiasm, and arouse our energies,—when our faded and shrivelled forms are assimilated to the withered leaves, that hang trembling on their sapless stalks, and are brushed off by the slightest breeze that stirs the murmuring woods.

Certainly, at no other season, are the lessons of the text, enforced so powerfully as when we see the tinted leaves falling thickly around us. There is a deep sympathy in the soul with the voice of nature. Each season calls forth emotions corresponding to its peculiar character. But the feelings excited by the autumnal season harmonize most closely with the great moral lessons which decaying nature, then, presents to the eye, in a form so pensive and beautiful, as to impress them more permanently upon the heart.

Availing ourselves of this advantage, we will, in humble dependence upon God for light and direction, offer a few remarks suggested by the autumnal analogies of nature, and the spiritual condition of man. May the God and Father of the spirits of all flesh condescend to bless whatever may be said, that will conduce to his own glory, and rendering you more meet for the kingdom of heaven.

I shall not, my dear friends, attempt to follow out the many salutary lessons, which the beautiful and impressive language of the text suggests to the pious and sensitive mind. But permit me to claim your attention to a few thoughts in harmony with the pensive character of THIS season of the year, in the hope that by blending my instructions with the emotions to which the contemplation of decaying nature gives birth, they may find a readier entrance into your hearts, and give to the falling leaf a "sweet persuading tongue", that will preach to you of the folly of ungodly pursuits, and of the peace, and hope, and consolations, which belong to the exercise of true faith and piety.

"We all do fade as a leaf." This beautiful similitude, at once, recalls to our minds the scenes of past life — gives us an impressive picture of the closing hours of mortal existence—and leads the imagination beyond the cold and gloomy winter of death, to the time when the renovating breath of everlasting spring shall again awaken into conscious energy the sentient principles of our nature, and recall into renewed life and beauty our bodies that have been long slumbering in the dust. To

each of these views, in succession, we shall direct your attention, and endeavour to enforce the lessons they respectively teach.

The similitude in the text, when rightly considered, recalls to our minds the scenes of life that are past and gone. In connection with this view, we first of all remark, that

1st.—The season in which the leaf fades and falls is a season of Religious Meditation.

In contemplating the face of nature glowing in the softened light, and tinged with the thousand lovely hues of Autumn, we almost irresistibly connect the benignity and tender repose, that is shed over its every feature, with the gaiety and beauty of the Spring. The period has been so short, and the gradations have been so imperceptible, that we are insensibly led back to the time when the fig tree clothed itself with leaves—when the vine put on its promise—and the flowers appeared on the earth; and we view in rapid succession the mutations that have occurred from the first opening blossom, till smiling plenty is spread over the land. Surveying these alternations, with a calm, philosophic, and religious spirit, the mind becomes deeply impressed with the wisdom and benignity of that Gracious Being, who guides the footsteps of the year, through the various stages of growth, maturity, and decay. In the changes that are incessantly taking place, we mark the ceaseless agency of the unseen, unchangeable God, who arranges and combines all things for the accomplishment of that great plan, by which he re-

veals himself to his intelligent creatures, who, animated with the love and spirit of Christ Jesus, earnestly seek to know Him—and to them alone—"for no man can ascend unto the Father but by the Son." Nor—since we cannot form any definite conception of pure spirit in the abstract—can we apprehend God, but through his works. The revelations of himself in his works and in his word are not distinct revelations. There is a perfect harmony between them. There is more,—there is perfect unity. They are but several parts of one harmonious,—all-embracing,—God-devised,—God-wrought plan. THIS, indeed, appears to be divided and subdivided to infinity. But, in every subordinate department, that has been submitted to human research, there is the same distinctness, harmony, and unity, which the calm, untroubled eye of contemplative faith discovers in the universe, viewed as a whole. In the succession of the Seasons, we behold but the parts of one grand system. The infant Spring, with its blended smiles and tears,—the vigorous Summer, arrayed in its rich luxuriance,—the sober liveried Autumn, with its ripened abundance,— the chilly Winter, with its gloom and desolation,—present but an unbroken circle of beauty and beneficence, adapted to the happiness and improvement of mankind.

When we look upon the faded leaf, we are not only led to reflect on the mutations that have occurred in inanimate nature, within the last few months, but on the changes, also, that have taken place in our own corporeal frames since the spring-

time of life. We see in it an emblem of our own mutable condition. We instinctively turn to the past. We take in at one glance the seasons of blooming youth, and vigorous manhood, and hoary age; and we behold in all these but the different arrangements of one great plan for developing the noble powers and faculties with which our Maker hath endowed us, and preparing us for that higher state of existence, which shall succeed the mutations of this earthly scene. Led by the falling leaf to contemplate God in the changing scenes of nature, the beneficent designs of Providence in guiding man through the various stages of his being, will be irresistibly forced upon our thoughts. Impressed with the wisdom and goodness of the divine arrangements, a fresh impulse will be given to our nobler energies, and we will repose with a feeling of holier security and firmer trust in the mercy of our God.

It is in the morning of life, when our hearts are comparatively pure, and our feelings warm, and life beams upon us with a brilliancy and power, unseen, unfelt, in every succeeding stage of our earthly pilgrimage, that our thoughts of God are most holy —that our feelings of reverence and love are most ardent and devout—that our conceptions of virtue are least tainted with the pollutions of the world. It is then,—and before we are plunged into the vortex of business, or our affections are crushed by the disappointments, or our hearts are hardened by the intercourse of life,—that we offer unto God the purest incense that ascends from our taber-

nacles of clay. Doubt does not damp its fervour; Distrust does not sully its purity. It may be evanescent, but it is artless, and profoundly reverent. These views and impressions are not only valuable on account of the early tendency to devotion which they cherish, but as affording a standard of our moral and religious feelings, taken before our opinions were modified, or our affections were impaired by the corroding influences of the world;—a standard, by which it would be beneficial to us, to compare the state of our hearts and conduct in the succeeding stages of life. My Brethren! You cannot have failed to observe how universally, as if by the appointment of heaven, those who are entering into the vale of years, turn their thoughts to the spring-time of their days,—to that delicious season when hope was young, and every thing seemed to smile in the love of the benignant Creator. They talk with rapture of the deeds of their earlier days. The remembrance of the innocent enjoyments of opening life, rekindle in their dimmed eyes a fresh lustre, and give, for a moment, to the stiffened frame, the energy and elasticity of youth. The home of their Fathers, with its endearing associations, — the House of their God, into which they first entered with the worshipping multitudes,—the lessons of piety poured into the ready ear, in the sweetest tones of maternal love,—these, and the thousand other sweet remembrances of early life, will come over the heart, like sun-gleams on the ripening corn. The scenes that were but lately contemplated, and the incidents of recent occur-

rence may be forgotten; but the scenes and incidents of childhood and youth can never be forgotten. A moment of leisure, and the falling of a leaf, will set in motion that mysterious machinery which will bring before us "the days of other years", when free from the actual vices of the world, and comparatively pure from its pollutions, we looked abroad on the face of nature with a gladsome eye, and surveyed the picture of life which our imaginations had pourtrayed, without one anxious thought to damp our enthusiasm, or disturb our dream of anticipated bliss.

If the current of our thoughts takes a religious bent, our retrospections into early life, cannot but be attended with a soothing and salutary influence on the heart. The purer thoughts, and fresher feelings of these days of innocence and peace, will in some measure return with the remembrance of the objects with which they were associated, and will impart somewhat of their elevating, sanctifying, fervour to our hearts, bowed down with the heavy load of sorrow and of sin. Like the fitful sun-gleam on the ripening fruits that are smiling among the yellowing leaves, they will come to tint with beauty the declining years of life, and ripen those intellectual and moral fruits, which fit the soul for heaven.

If the spring-time and summer of our days have not been clouded with the vices, and disturbed by the stormy passions of our fallen nature, and the ripened fruits of life and immortality have been gathered home to the heart, it will not only be with peculiar satisfaction, but with the highest advan-

tages, that we will turn our eyes back upon all the way by which the good providence of God has led us. We will not only remember the time when God gave us being, amongst his works, and nourished and cherished it, by his never-failing bounty; but the time also when the Spirit of God breathed new life into our souls, and nourished it by the continual dews of heaven till it strengthened and grew apace. Every stage in its progress will present many circumstances, the remembrance of which will be both pleasing and instructive. The artless worship of our paternal home, welling, like a crystal fountain, from the very depths of the soul. —the Sabbath—the Sanctuary—the seasons of joy and of sorrow through which we have passed—the constant ministrations of grace—a Saviour's love, and a Saviour's sorrows, with all their sweet and hallowing influences,—in a word, all that retarded, and all that accelerated our Christian life, will come crowding on our thoughts, making us once more realize the feelings of that "sweet hour of prime", when our piety was freshest and sweetest, like the vernal flowers bathed in the dews of the morning.

Such reflections, evoked, it may be, by the falling of a leaf, the good man will indulge as the source of his highest happiness; and the pious man will cherish, as leading to that wisdom which maketh wise unto salvation. But into any train of reflection which the history of human life suggests, more especially that which is set in motion by the profusion of the bounties of Autumn—the unwea-

ried, the undeserved, the unbounded beneficence of God, must occupy a large, and an essential part. In connection with the review which our text naturally leads us to take of the goodness of God, manifested in the happy adaptation of external nature to the moral elevation of the human race, and the rich provision made both for their spiritual and temporal wants, we remark—

2nd.—The season of the falling leaf, is a season of religious joy and thankfulness.

In no other season of the year, is there so rich and full a tone given to the responsive gladness of the human heart, as when "the joyous reapers bear their harvest treasures home". The sprightly gaiety of the ploughman—nor the calm cheerfulness of the sower, when a genial seed-time has mellowed the earth—nor even the jocund mirth of the husbandman when his labours are ended, and "he eats that which he hath gathered, and praises the Lord," is so heart-felt, as the joy of the reaper, when he gathers in rich handfuls his golden sheaves. His toils have been crowned with success. His anxious hopes have been all fulfilled. A rich store, has been provided for himself, and all who are dependent upon him. The very instincts of his nature burst forth in tones of thankfulness. His heart expands, and the poor and the needy he calls to rejoice with him. He is a churl, beyond the ordinary heartlessness of humanity, if the generous influences of Harvest Home, do not unloose whatsoever of selfishness he may have wrapped around his heart. But if his feelings are rightly touched—

if from amidst the profusion of blessings which surround him, he looks to God the Giver,—if conscious (as he ought ever to be,) that he is undeserving of the least of them all; and that whatever of labour or of skill he has employed in their production, that really no more has been employed, if it has been properly expended, than what has contributed to his happiness, and that notwithstanding all his efforts, were it not for the sustaining providence of Him who rules the year, in a moment, all might have been blasted, and desolation frown where plenty smiles. If thus he feels, and acknowledges his dependence upon God, how ardent will his love and veneration be—how sincere his thankfulness—how confiding his trust in the protecting care and sustaining mercy of that Gracious Being, whose goodness is everlasting. Year after year has come round—day hath succeeded day, and night hath followed night. Never, since the creation of the world, have the Seasons forgotten their courses. It hath never happened, that the year hath not been crowned with the divine bountifulness. The very storms and tempests that seem to lay nature desolate; but hush it into temporary repose, that it may awaken into renewed life, in greater freshness and beauty.

Amidst such amazing displays of beneficence—such a continued succession of blessings—can man distrust the loving kindness of the Lord, or cease to be animated by a sense of confiding affection and adoring gratitude. And the more so, that all these are mingled with, and are the emblems of nobler spiritual benefits, which, even with a freer grace

and in richer profusion, is pressed upon his acceptance. On the darkness of his spiritual night, "the sun of righteousness has arisen with healing in his wings." The grace of the Spirit, like the softly falling dews of Hermon, or the early and latter rain, has descended to bless the ordinances of the gospel, and to refresh the weary and fainting soul. The seasons of devotion, diversified by their characteristic blossoms and fruits, have come in constant succession. Evening hours of meditative thought, have come—Sabbaths of holy rest, have come—Days of high communion, have come. The "fruits of the Spirit" are ripened. The "bread of heaven" is provided. The thankful soul, overwhelmed with a sense of undeserved goodness, finds not language adequately to express its grateful feelings. What is the joy of the natural man, "even when his corn and wine do most abound," in comparison with the joyous gratitude of him, in whose heart the seeds of eternal life have been sown, and have ripened, and who has gathered home to his bosom the fruits of righteousness and peace. The "joy of harvest" is deep, earnest, heartfelt; but what is it, in comparison to that spiritual joy which fills the soul, that has been awakened to the consciousness of divine life, and has been fitted, through the preparatory discipline of time, for a heavenly inheritance. Who, can fully comprehend the blessedness of the man who has arisen from death into life—who knows the love of Christ—who "is filled with all the fullness of God," who is moved by the ever-growing, ever-sanctifying power

of "endless life." His happiness is not of earth —it is of heaven. It is like the happiness of God, springing from the inner depths of the mind—ineffable—immortal. Springing from Christ dwelling in him: and yet, it is not like God's happiness in every respect; for it is imparted, not inherent and essential. Its principal element consists in the consciousness of its dependence on HIM, whose love is infinite, unchangeable, eternal. It is the happiness of humble adoring thankfulness—the happiness of the exalted Spirits around the throne on high, who feel, and acknowledge their dependence upon Him who sitteth thereon; and as unworthy to look upon His uncreated Majesty, they veil their faces with their wings, and casting their crowns at his feet, they ascribe unto Him all their glory.

Brethren! Is this language, to your ears mystical and strange? Are these feelings, and these joys unknown to your hearts? Do they seem to you, to be incompatible with the nature God hath given you, and incapable of being realized by any of the children of the dust? Must I say, that these things ought to be, in place of affirming that they actually exist? Alas! we are forced to admit, that we have been rather anticipating the blessed, yet certain results of the transforming power of Christ's gospel, than describing the actual developements of that power, as yet exhibited on the earth. These are feelings and joys which the renewed soul alone can experience, but which, amidst the blendings of worldly influences, it can experience only in a very

limited and imperfect degree on earth. The natural man can have no conception of them whatsoever, for "they are spiritually discerned". Every thing that is said respecting them, to him must appear mystical and absurd. But even when the heart is warmed and subdued by grace, the tenderness and fervency of its affections, but little correspond to the magnitude of the divine favours. There is an earthliness in its thoughts and feelings, that clogs its purer aspirations, and prevents it from ascending into the immediate presence of God, with a sinless offering of gratitude. Yes, the holiest, and the best, must be humbled under the consciousness of much insensibility to divine goodness, even while it is displayed on every side,—and the voice of nature from without, and the inspirations of the Holy Spirit from within, loudly, earnestly, and affectionately, call to thankfulness.

But, Brethren, we are compelled to take a deeper, darker, view, of human thanklessness than this, both in respect to the bounties of Providence, and the riches of divine grace. The instinctive feelings of our nature, it is true, break forth in expressions of joy, when peace and plenty is spread over the land. But seldom are the religious emotions of the heart in unison with these impulses of our physical nature. Nay, the stirrings of our animal life are too often blighted and destroyed, by the godless, thankless spirit, within. The earth, in the appointed season, hears the voice of the Creator, and in obedience to his call, comes forth arrayed in gladness and beauty. The heavens, with their glorious

hosts,—the mighty ocean, with its uplifted waves, —the "cloud cap'd" mountains, and rushing streams, all proclaim the glory of his power. Irrational animals attune their voices, and join in the universal anthem, that ascends unto Him who gave all things their being. It is a primary law of man's physical nature, to respond to the characteristic tones of the external world. All, there, is attuned to harmony. Man cannot be silent, when all else is joyous. His animal instincts are in sympathy with nature's universal song. But ah! how often are these instinctive testimonies of gratitude silenced, by the cold atheistic spirit, that sullenly frowns amidst the outpoured beneficence of God. Where is that gratitude to be found, that corresponds with the divine bountifulness? Here and there, in the world's wide expanse, you may find a few—a very few—who, with devout and grateful hearts, bring the wave-sheaf of the first fruits of their spiritual harvest, and present it unto God the Giver, of every gift. But it must be admitted, that this is not a general characteristic of fallen humanity. The human heart is cold and selfish, amidst the teaming abundance of earth's comforts. The general history of man's life, is distinguished by indifference—by would-be independence—by thanklessness. Has the Lord "crowned the year with goodness"?—His gifts are enjoyed, but the bounty of the giver is unacknowledged. Has man put forth his skill in the labours of the field, and has his toils been succeeded by a rich harvest?—then he denies—it may be silently, but he practi-

cally denies—that he is indebted to God for any favour. As he looks on his "floors full of wheat, and his fats overflowing with wine and oil,"—the real—it may be the unexpressed—but the real sentiment of his heart is "by the strength of mine hand have I obtained this, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent". In times of great degeneracy, does God call upon men to repentance, "by bringing a famine upon the land, and breaking the whole staff of bread"?—Does he shew to them, that he is the God of the Seasons, "by withholding his rain, that the seed sown in the furrows spring not," or sending it in overflowing streams, "that it may rot under the clods"?—Does he cause the "joy in harvest" to perish, notwithstanding all the ingenuity, and science, and industry, which men employ to bring to perfection the fruits of the earth; and does he tell them, that it is for their guilt he brings these evils upon them, and that they may turn again unto him in faith and penitence?—Is it the wailing of penitential sorrow that is heard, and the eager rushing of multitudes returning unto God? No: It is the sullen voice of murmuring and complaint, mingling with the audacious cries of blasphemy and despair. Is this, in its general features, a correct representation of man's ingratitude? Do we perceive its obvious application to the bulk of mankind? Are we ready, unsparingly to condemn such heartlessness and guilt? Before we censure, let us pause for a moment, and look into our own hearts; and while we think of God and his goodness, can we dare to say that it does not apply to

ourselves? What cause have we all, for deep humiliation and shame.

Brethren! It is a painful and distressing thought, that man, formed to comprehend and adore the loving kindness of the Lord, should yet fail to acknowledge the claims He has on his gratitude—that he should revel on the bounties provided for him, and yet thank not the Giver. But it is still more painful that he should be still more thankless for gifts of a far higher nature;—nay, that he should utterly despise and reject them. Thankless as he is for the temporal comforts of this passing scene, he is not insensible to them. He earnestly desires them,—He struggles to obtain them,—He enjoys them. "Take no thought," said our blessed Lord, "for you life, what ye shall eat or what ye shall drink, nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on;" but, heedless of this injunction, and distrustful of the unslumbering providence of God, men toil and struggle for these things alone. Holiness, peace, pardon, friendship with God, eternal life, occupy little of their thoughts. They are graciously offered to their acceptance; but they are contemned. When Christ came into this world, "He was despised and rejected of men,"—He is despised and rejected still. He seeks a *home* in the human heart; but, as in the "days of His flesh," he had not where to lay His head,—so He is homeless and unsheltered still. Where is the heart that receives Him, and kindly entertains Him? Where are they, who toil for the bread that giveth life unto the world, with half the earnestness that they toil for the bread that perish-

eth? Where are they, that are so anxious to be clothed with the robe of purity, humility, and love, as to put on the gay attire and glittering ornaments of the world? Where are they, who honor their blessed Master, by receiving that "mould of doctrine" which would transform them to His divine image? Where are they, who yield their hearts to his love—who resign themselves to his will—who listen to the words of inspiration, as unto the voice of "him who spake as never man spake"? He is with them still; "lo I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." He speaks to them still. In his word, and by his spirit, he communes with them who receive him. He tells them of his love—how he left the glories of his throne, that he might come into the world, to suffer and die for them,—and what he hath provided for them who love him and believe in him. A richer harvest of blessings than ever rejoiced the heart of the husbandman in the most genial season, he has provided. They are freely and earnestly offered unto all. Without money and without price, all may partake of them. They are not procured with silver and gold. They cannot be purchased by any thing, or every thing that the created universe can offer. They are the spontaneous gifts of Heaven, brought to the poor as well as to the rich, by the Son of God, in the travail of his soul. To accept of them in faith, and with thanksgiving, and to cherish and cultivate them with assiduous care, are the sole conditions on which they are offered,—nay, tenderly and affectionately pressed by the messengers of God, on the

acceptance of the needy, but, alas! too often pressed in vain. "Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed"? was the mournful complaint of ancient Prophets and Apostles. Is there not cause for the preachers of the Gospel of Salvation, in the bitterness of disappointed hope, to make the same earnest enquiry still? Who hath believed their report, when appealing to the consciences of dying men they spoke to them of their miserable and guilty condition—of God's holiness—of Christ's love, and sufferings, and grace? Who hath seen in the mission of the "Man of Sorrows" (the "rejected and despised" of men, but the beloved and chosen of God,) the arm of the Lord made bare for the redemption of a death-doomed world? Who have received the blessed proclamation of the gospel of peace, unto honest, and believing, and thankful hearts? Do Sabbaths kept holy, and bibles earnestly read, and sanctuaries resorted to by worshipping multitudes, and secret prayer cherished, and a holy walk and conversation cultivated, demonstrate; that the tidings of peace on earth, and good will toward men, are "good tidings of great joy unto all people," and that the blessings of salvation are sought after, and valued above all that is desirable on earth? Ah! Brethren, how often are we forced to confess, that this is not a general characteristic of fallen humanity. Here and there—like neglected fruit upon the leafless tree, or a solitary flower lifting feebly its head amidst the desolations of approaching winter,—a few may be found, who earnestly seek God, and

patiently wait for his salvation. But the great mass of those to whom the riches of divine grace have been offered, despise and reject them,—nay, they are often contemptuously trampled under foot, in the fearful struggle for earthly honors and distinctions. Oh! is there not something dreadful in the thought, that there is such an eager rushing of men, to secure the temporal possessions of the world, and such a general neglect of the far higher blessings of "life and immortality,"—that the bread that perisheth should be earnestly sought for; and the "bread that giveth life unto the world" thrown contemptuously away, — that raiment should be toiled for; and the proffered robe of righteousness rejected,—that the health of the body should be cherished; while the soul, which, in value, is above all worlds, is left unheeded to die: "for what shall a man be profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul." Man shews much thanklessness for the blessings of Providence. He is not only thankless, he is blasphemous and daring in respect to the nobler blessings of Eternal Redemption.

My Brethren! Let us not stop in taking a general view of the ungodliness of our species. This will not lead to any good results, unless we view it also minutely and circumstantially. Instead of scrutinizing the conduct of others, let us rather look back upon our own conduct, and dive deep into our own hearts, and we will find enough of ungodliness to lament and mourn over. Let ours,

be that godly sorrow that produces reformation. Let us not spend our time in idle regret, but be up and doing, redeeming the time we have lost. There is something more important, than "what we shall eat, or what we shall drink, or wherewithal we shall be clothed",—something more valuable than riches. A work that must be done—if done at all—before the wintry season of death sets in. We must gather home to the soul, the fruits of righteousness, that have become ripe for heaven. It will be altogether our own fault, unless we have our spiritual harvest secured. O! what cause have we for unbounded thankfulness, that we have only to go forth, and in faith and patience gather of the richest fruits. But if we are indifferent to what the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ hath provided for us, misery and death will be our inevitable portion.

I would therefore further remark, that the season of the falling leaf is a season of activity—a season for securing the fruits of righteousness—a season when we should have an experimental sense of the blessings of salvation—and tasting that "God is good and gracious, and ready to forgive," rest patiently in his love, in the holy hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ. The illustration of these topics we shall reserve as the subject of another discourse.

May God bless what has been said, to his own glory and your spiritual edification.—Amen.

SERMON II.

Isaiah lxiv, 6.—"We all do fade as a leaf."

My Friends!—In directing your attention to some of the lessons taught by the beautiful similitude in the text, we have, in the preceding discourse, considered the season in which the leaf fades, and falls from the tree.

1st. As a season of religious reflection,—as a season, when we are naturally led to take an enlarged view of the wisdom and goodness of the Great Creator and Ruler of the world, displayed in the succession of the seasons; and in the happy adaptation of external nature, to the moral and religious advancement of the human race.

2d. As a season of religious joy and thanksgiving,—a season when the beauty and bountifulness of nature, alike, call us to rejoice, and thank Him who "hath crowned the year with goodness."

3d. We now proceed to remark, that the season in which the leaf fades and falls, solemnly reminds us of the necessity of securing the fruits of righteousness; and having the Christian character perfected, and prepared for eternity.

It was not to find rest in this changing and troubled world, but to fit us for a higher destiny, that the Great

Creator called us into being—it was, that, by the atoning death of the Redeemer, and the varied discipline of this temporary scene, He might prepare us for that eternal rest that remaineth for His own people, in heaven above. In vain will we seek for permanent peace, or lasting tranquility, amidst the fluctuations and tumults of time. There are, it is true, short seasons of repose to be found, even in this world—calm Sabbaths —nights of quiet rest—and days of peaceful stillness; but they come in between long seasons of toil, and thoughtfulness. They are but the symbols of future blessings, not the condition of our present being. This life is a life of activity and toil. For man's trangression, a curse fell upon the ground. Thorns and thistles were to be its spontaneous productions. Its nutritious fruits it was only to yield to patient and persevering industry; but ever richly and generously have its productive energies been evoked by his toils. A deadlier curse seems to have fallen on his soul. It is a law of physical life, that man must eat his bread in the sweat of his brow. It is also a law in the spiritual life, that the fruits of righteousness be matured by the most laborious skill. The heart must be cultivated with care. It must be opened up to the genial influences of heaven. The dew of the Spirit must be permitted to fall on it. Divine ordinances, like the early and latter rain, must constantly refresh it. The noxious weeds of vice and passion, must be uprooted from it. The seeds of immortality must be sown in it, and from their earliest germs, must be watched and tended throughout all their successive developments. It is true, salvation, in

all its departments, is God's work. Its blessings are spontaneous gifts. To accept of them in faith, and with thanksgiving and cherish them in humble and sincere hearts, are the sole conditions on which they are offered. They are perfect and complete in themselves, as all God's works are; but in their application to individuals they are but in embryo, awaiting to be developed by the power of God, working in his people, both to will and to do. As the rudiments of the gigantic oak are all perfect and complete in the acorn, so, all the elements of eternal life are found in Christ received into the heart by faith. For their development, a more wonderful and effective system of organization has been provided, than for the development of the natural life. A brighter sun than ever warmed the earth shines upon man's spiritual desolation; more genial influences than the renovating breath of spring evoke the latent energies of his immortal nature. A richer culture than ever fertilized the ground is bestowed upon his heart, to enrich it with the qualities of divine life, and make it abound with the fruits of righteousness and peace. Hitherto all this to human view has been without corresponding results. The Sun of righteousness, the influences of the Spirit, the love and sufferings, and death of the Redeemer, have not yet warmed--penetrated with life--and indued with the attributes of a divine nature, the dead corrupted mass of humanity. Our iniquities, like a dark cloud, are interfused between us and our God--they intercept the rays of His presence—they resist the influences of His spirit--they shut up the heart to the love and mercy of the Redeemer. So long as God is

thus shut out from the soul, there can be no life there. Insensible to His goodness, it must remain unthankful—unholy. How long it shall continue in this wintry state, He, who directeth all things, and bringeth them about in their appointed seasons, alone shall determine. We have abundant evidence, that there is in operation a divine agency that will penetrate the dead mass of humanity, with a living energy, and a fruit-bearing power. If we see not yet this vital power universally diffused over the wide expanse of this wintry world, we see its partial operations. We have the harbingers of the coming spring. Individual hearts have been warmed into life by the animating breath of God. In special instances, the seeds of righteousness have found a lodgement in the soul, and have sprung up, giving the fairest promises of the most bountiful returns. Nay: the first fruits of the harvest, in well cultivated spots, have been gathered, and like the wave-sheaf of old, have been presented with thankfulness unto the Lord. We may indeed cry out, as we survey the still surrounding desolation 'How long, O Lord, how long, shall the hearts of the sons of men remain cold and sterile under the fructifying influences of thy word and Spirit!' and we may earnestly join the Church in her prayer. "Awake, O north wind, and come, thou south, and blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out." But in all our waiting, and in all our expectations, we will rejoice in the faith, that God will arise and have mercy upon Sion, and when the time, the set time to favour her, shall have come, He will cause her desolation to come to an end.

Brethren! we are not able to penetrate the mysteries of Providence; nor, can we comprehend aright, the manifestations of Divine power that are visible in the world. All may appear dark, and cold, and lifeless to us, but the consummation of God's gracious plans, may be much nearer than we can discover, and the circumstances, that to our weak perceptions, seem to retard them, may be the very instruments which He employs to accelerate their progress, and bring them to a conclusion; when all must perceive, and acknowledge the might of His wonder-working hand. But, whatever obscurity may invest His purposes with mankind at large, there can be no dubiety in His procedure with respect to them individually. He is ever ready to bestow upon them, in His appointed way, His choicest gifts. He is waiting to be gracious. He hath provided the most ample means for bringing to perfection the fruits of holiness. His blessed Gospel—its words "instinct with life,"—its refreshing ordinances, and delightful privileges have been freely given "for the perfecting of the Saints—for the edifying of the body of Christ." These, if rightly appreciated, and duly improved, will be assuredly followed by the most blessed results. But if we neglect the means of grace, and fail to lay up for ourselves treasures in Heaven, we can hardly expect that we will look forward, with undismayed hearts, to the closing scenes of our earthly pilgrimage, or anticipate without horror, the state of retribution that lies beyond the verge of time.

Brethren! important as the work is, which is given us to execute, the time is short, in which it must be

finished. Within the brief compass of human life, the whole business of salvation must be brought to a close. The seasons are constantly advancing; each one has its appropriate work. When it has gone, it will never return. It will carry with it the peculiar advantages it offered for improvement; if they have been neglected, they will be lost forever. It is not a befitting season to begin to make provision for the cold and pinching winter, when the winds sigh in the woods, and the leaves drop from the trees. The whole life should be a preparation for eternity. There should be no standing still; there is not a moment for idleness; there should be a constant pressing onwards to perfection. In vain will the husbandman expect to fill his barns, and refresh himself with the "abundance of good things," who has neglected his fields in the spring-tide and summer. It will be equally vain for us to expect to reap where we have not sowed, or be enriched with the fruits of righteousness, if we have permitted the spring-time and summer of our days to pass away without sowing in our hearts the principles of religion and virtue, and as they expanded in the light and breath of Heaven, nourishing them continually from the fountain of life.

Brethren! if we put our hand to the plough, we must steadily persevere in the course we have entered upon. We must allow no difficulty or discouragement to cause us to abandon our work. Till the latest period of life we must be still pressing forward. There is always something to be done—some allurement to be resisted—some grace to be cherished—some corruption to be overcome. Even the man who has arrived

at the highest degree of Christian excellence, will have always occasion to secure what he has acquired. The husbandman leaves not the fruits of his labours to rot upon the ground. He gathers them with care, and stores them against the calls of the approaching winter, when he would look in vain for subsistence from the snow-clad fields. The sincere Christian manifests a still deeper anxiety in securing that holiness, without which, no man can see the Lord. With him, a meetness for Heaven is paramount to everything else. He may be "diligent in business," but he will be "fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." He may earnestly seek after, and fully enjoy, the bounties of Providence; but his earthly pursuits, he will ever subordinate to his spiritual interests. The very cares of life, he will convert into acts of duty and obedience to God. All its enjoyments, he will make exercises of holy gratitude and praise. He will "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness," being well assured, that however prosperous he may be in the world, unless his soul also prospers, he will be miserably poor and naked. His barns may be ready to burst with the profusion of his corn, and his fields may be overflowing with wine and with oil; but how little would they all avail him, if he had neglected his eternal interests, to procure these things, which he cannot for a single moment call his own? It is in the piercing words of earnestness and truth—in words of awful import—that our Lord describes the ineffable folly of the rich worldling, gazing with self-complaisant satisfaction on his hoarded heaps. —yet, still "careful and troubled about many things"— still seeing happiness in the enchanting hues which

distance lends—confidently anticipating many years of sensual enjoyment, at the very moment, that, God thus inwardly addresses him: "Thou FOOL! this night is thy soul required of thee." What a demonstration of folly! What bitter irony in the expostulation, "Whose *then* shall these things be?"

Harvest has its joys—it has also its labours. Nor is there any period in which the Christian relaxes his toils; for he is never at any time insensible to the dangers that on every side threaten to destroy his hopes of immortality. He is, therefore, continually on his guard. Never is he at rest, until he entertains a hope, approaching to assurance, that his sins have been forgiven, and God is reconciled unto him, through the "blood of the cross." The whole course of his pilgrimage, since the seeds of spiritual life were sown in his heart, has been a state of unremitted watchfulness, anxiety, and toil—a state of earnest preparation for eternity. Many have been his conflicts and trials, arising from outward temptations, and inward corruptions, but, through the influences of God's word and Spirit, they have ripened his soul for heaven. They may have been frequently terrible, and often distressing—he may have been ready to exclaim, all thy billows have gone over me, and my soul is overwhelmed within me; but at length God has brought him out of all his distresses, with his faith confirmed, and his hopes and desires purified and exalted in proportion to the severity of his trials. As his life draws to a close, he finds, through his abounding work in the Lord, that his labour has not been in vain. He perceives that the things for which he earnestly toiled, are ap-

proaching to perfection. His labours begin to be lightened. A change has already passed upon his views and feelings. He begins now, to experience the comforts of religion. The path he treads, is a path of pleasantness and peace. His fields are ripe unto the harvest, but he must gather in and secure the fruits of his industry. When his piety has become habitual—when the fruits of the Spirit have been matured in his soul; he does not intermit his Christian duties, any more than the husbandman relaxes his labours when his fields are waving with corn ripe for the sickle. It is, too, with the Christian "the joy of harvest." God has crowned his labours with his blessing, and he rejoices in the divine goodness. He has not now to contend with his spiritual enemies in deadly strife. Satan has been conquered, the power of sin in his soul has been overthrown, and it is the lingering, fainting, but tenacious death-struggle only, he has now to contend with. The agitations and tumults of passion have subsided. The fascinations of the world have lost their power. Enlarged views of the economy of salvation have been imparted to him. A fuller experience of Christ's love comforts him. A firmer faith in the divine promises sustains him. And his whole character, even amidst the dimning shadows of earth, begin to assume the beauty and lustre of Heaven.

4th. The similitude in our text gives us an impressive representation of the finished labours of man, and the closing scenes of his earthly existence.

We all do fade as a leaf! What an impressive emblem of human life! The bud just opening to the breath of spring—now fully expanded and waving

in the breeze—then, wan and shrivelled, brushed off from its parent stem, by the first passing gust of wind,—finally, lying on the ground and decomposing into its original elements, is strikingly descriptive of the several stages in the progress of human life. Annually, the same features of progress and decay, are presented in the vegetable world. So it is with the generations of men. One goeth; it is silently replaced by another, which is equally transient. Thus it has been,—thus it ever shall be, until all the countless multitudes who have ever lived on the earth shall be mingled with the dust, and a new heaven and a new earth will be prepared for their reception.

Every moment is advancing this consummation. Changes are passing on the more permanent features of the world; and many are the indications, that it too, is getting old, and hastening to dissolution. God, alone, endureth for aye. The earth shall wax old—the mountains shall be removed—the sun shall be darkened—the moon shall cease to give her light—the stars shall perish in the sky—the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat. In the midst of this change and decay, the life of man is still more fleeting. The lapse of every hour is operating some change on his corporeal frame, and advancing him another step in his journey to the tomb. The autumn's sober loveliness and ripened bountifulness, slowly sinking into a state of unrelieved dreariness and decay, bring before us with impressive solemnity the close of human life, when the bloom of beauty will wither—when the strength and gracefulness of manhood will decay—when the matured excel-

lence of age will sink into the cold and lonely grave. They remind us of the time when the innumerable multitudes of men who now rejoice in the conscious energy of life, will be swept away like leaves on the rustling blast.

Thus, brethren! ends the earthly history of us all. We all do fade as a leaf. We may be prematurely swept away like the green and fresh leaves on the blast, "for man at his best state is altogether vanity;" he is like the morning flower, "a wind passes over it and it is gone." But should we survive the numerous ills that are incident to the earlier periods of life, we shall certainly, all soon sink under the weight of years, and the infirmities of decaying nature. Like the leaves of the autumn which the wind scatters on the ground, we shall be torn from life and all its enjoyments, and laid low in the dust.

How affectingly are these truths told us by decaying nature! The young may shut their ears to its solemn admonitions. Nay: the voice of instruction coming to them (as it does) from afar, may be mellowed into the sweetest notes of hopeful expectation. They measure time by their own experience of its duration. They have no corresponding ideas to its immensity, as it stretches into eternity. The short stage in the journey of life, which they have already passed, appears long to them, because it is all they personally know of time. The part of it still before them, being indefinite, seems almost interminable—an impression which the succession of the seasons tends to confirm. Much of the flowery spring they have yet to pass through. The whole of the beauteous summer is still

before them. Long, long, they think it will be, before they will enter on "the sere and yellow leaved autumn." In the bloom of youthful beauty—or in the vigor and strength of manhood, they cannot comprehend the fact, that deepening wrinkles and feeble decrepitude will come to ripen them for the grave. If they give heed at all to the teachings of autumn, it will be through its pictorial illustrations of the ravages of time—not by its direct appeals to their individual sympathies. It will be by its varied heart-touching analogies, to the crowding infirmities of age, in those with whose being their own seems inseparably entwined—in the bending form and tottering step of much loved, revered parents, who have become like the faded leaf, and from whom they must soon part, that they will perceive, and *feel*, that the days of the years of our pilgrimage are few and evil.

But, my young friends! although the tendency of of your buoyant feelings is to look far onward into the inviting scenes of life, in the anticipation amounting to confidence of enjoyment, these expectations are most delusive. Ah! many a fair form has been pillowed on the dust, long, long before the vital current has stagnated in their veins! Many a stalwart frame has been laid low in the grave, before the infirmities of age have bent it downwards! Like tender leaves shrivelled by an untimely frost, multitudes have been carried away in the spring-tide of life.—They were scarcely seen in the world. They looked into it and departed. It was too wintry and cold, for them to live in it, and they hasted away to a more genial clime. Multitudes more, by accident or disease, have been rudely forced

from life and its enjoyments, like the fresh leaves of the summer when the tempest raves wildly in the woods. The leaves present a striking—but not perhaps in every point,—a perfect representation of the state of man. The mass of foliage remains on the trees till the latest days of autumn. The majority of human beings are carried away long before the fountain of life has been drained, by the exhaustive process of nature. The year has one harvest; Death has many. He strips the fresh as well as the faded leaf from the tree—the blossom as well as the fruit from the bough. He gathers into his garners the green as well as the yellow grain. My young friends! let not the delusive promises of the spring render you insensible to the uncertain tenure of human life. Let the fading leaf teach even you, lessons of heavenly wisdom. "In the morning it flourishes and grows, in the evening it is cut down and is withered." So suddenly, so unexpectedly, may you be "carried hence, to be no more forever."

The young may yield to the enchantments of hope, and dream of life and enjoyment in the season when nature seems dying around them. In the mournful scene, there may be nothing in sympathy with their joyous feelings. But, Brethren! it is far otherwise with us—if the morning and noontide of our days are already ended, and the evening is fast closing in. If we are sinking into the vale of years—if the "snows of eld" are scattered on our heads—if the warm flood of life is beginning to stagnate in our veins, and we feel that a saddening change has already passed upon our earthly condition—then the voice of nature speaks

directly home to our hearts. Everything around us, reminds us, that we have entered on the autumn of our existence. The moaning winds—the rustling leaves—the cold sun-gleams that fitfully fly over the field, are all memorials of our destiny. A plaintive voice, is, as it were, heard, saying, Behold in the faded leaf that is whirled on the blast, an emblem of your state. The heart that now throbs with the various passions and feelings that belong to humanity, will soon be forever at rest. Your bodies, which you now so anxiously care for, will be consigned to the earth, to claim kindred with corruption and the noisome worm.'

Ah, Brethren! if in the autumn of our days, we go forth to gaze on the face of nature, and in deep seriousness of heart, to muse on its silent but impressive lessons, an irrepressible melancholy will weigh down our spirits, if our views are confined to the earth, and our hearts are set upon its enjoyments. There is death, only, in the prospect. The cares of the world are over—its duties are all performed. In so far as we are concerned, soon we shall have done with them forever. What essentially belongs to the earth, however virtuous or honorable, shall never again affect us. And our bodies, which "are of the earth, earthy," shall drop into the grave and be mingled with kindred dust. To quit this world, still beautiful, though marred by sin—to surrender our affections, and become insensible to the love of those who are so dear to us—to lie down in the grave, into which the pleasant light of the sun shall never penetrate, and where no sounds of life will break upon the ear—is dreadful! The heart recoils from it. The very thought of it is harrowing

to our feelings. Every thing that reminds us of it, is shunned as an enemy to our peace. It fills us with profound melancholy, to behold the dying flowers and withering grass; or to listen to the wailing winds, that seem to chaunt a mournful requiem for departed gracefulness and beauty. "All flesh is grass, and all the glory of it, as the flower of grass; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth," is every where borne to the ears, and presented to the eyes. There is no freshness, no life in the prospect—every where decay; and the vision of death—cold, gloomy, loathsome death.

But, brethren! it is with joyous feelings—feelings, pensive indeed, but heartily joyous, that we look forth upon the earth, in its autumnal beauty, if the ripened fruits of immortality are being gathered home to the heart. The weary task of life is done. Its cares and sorrows are all ended. The season of sweet repose is at hand, and we look forward, in the exercise of a lofty faith, to the eternal enjoyment of the fruits of our labours, through our Lord Jesus Christ. He hath connected this world, where "Death reigns," with another and a better, where "they which receive abundance of grace, and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life." He hath made the exercises and duties of our present state the means of training us, and fitting us for our future being. The things, indeed, that are peculiar to our earthly condition, shall die. There is no longer any need for them. They have served their purposes, and we have done with them forever, but their effects extend through eternity. As the leaves and the grass, and all that seems annually to perish, but fall, to pass into other forms, to enrich

and fertilize the earth, and prepare it for renewed freshness and beauty, so, those exercises and duties, which occupied to much of our time, and were of such paramount importance on earth, but which shall find no place in Heaven above; were all divinely appointed to prepare us for that state, where they shall be no more needed. We shall have no more occasion to watch against temptations, or struggle with corruptions, or contend with the afflictions of mortal life, for there, nothing unholy can enter. We shall no longer be called upon to relieve the distressed—to comfort the sorrowful, and console the dying; for the inhabitants of that blessed land shall hunger no more, neither shall they thirst any more; neither shall they suffer death. There, there is life—all-penetrating, all-pervading life. Death, and all over whom death had power, are dead, and no more to be remembered. But, though many of our most important earthly occupations shall be laid forever aside, and some of our sweetest sublunary enjoyments shall no more be tasted, still, they were not, without serving the most momentous purposes. They strengthened faith, they confirmed hope, they made charity habitual. They were the means by which God disciplined the mind, sanctified the soul, and prepared the believer for Glory.

When the good man looks forth on the bare fields and leafless woods, although he is reminded that the task of life is done, and that his duties are ended, yet he perceives that they have had a direct influence on his eternal destinies. He sees no emblems of death in the temporary decay of nature.

As he beholds the wan leaf whirling to the ground, and the withered grass and drooping flowers matting the soil; the earth seems to him to be putting off its gay attire, and wrapping itself up in a warm covering, preparatory to the season of repose which shall precede the morning of spring. Tracing in the changes that take place, the beautiful analogies subsisting between the vegetable and animal creation, the melancholy—naturally awakened by the consciousness that life is ebbing fast within, and that soon like the withered leaf, we shall fall into the dust—is dissipated, by the review of that ceaseless kindness, which has followed us all the days of our lives, and is pressed into the cup of enjoyment with accumulated profusion in the closing hours of mortal existence,—connected as they are with the higher and enduring blessings of the life that is forevermore. We behold in the various changes that take place in the course of Providence—even its darker and sadder scenes, with their interlaced beauty and blending beneficence—but the developments of one Great Plan, to secure our eternal happiness—Nay: but the initiatory steps only of that plan. We connect the earthly with the heavenly state—temporal with eternal life, and the blessings which are crowded into the scenes of earthly enjoyment with the richer and fuller blessings of the Kingdom of God. We see all things here below, by a Divine Agency, ministering to the perfecting of our nature, and its revivification in greater power and beauty, after a short but temporary suspension of its vital powers. There is no death; Christ hath abolished death. Nature dies but to live again. The earth

rests and is renewed. The roots hid in its bosom, gather fresh vitality from temporary repose. Even the things that seem to perish, assume new and ethereal forms. Our bodies, too, that are laid in the grave, and decay, die but to live again. "The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it. They enter upon a new economy of being. In their separation, each is undergoing great and important changes that could not take place while they were intimately united. The body, it is true, has become dead to the world and all its enjoyments, but it is not dead to the mighty power of God. It is not forgotten in its lonely and silent mansion. In all its loathsomeness and corruption, it is dear unto Him who bought it with his own life, and by laying His own body in the grave. He is changing, moulding, spiritualizing it, and fitting it for the unveiled effulgence of Divine Majesty. It is undergoing those mysterious transformations through which in due time it will be raised up a spiritual and immortal body—all this is effecting, in its disorganized state, without the necessary infliction of pain or suffering, which in a living organized form would be utterly insupportible. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." That, will be deposited in the dust, but out of it, a spiritual creation will spring up—the same; yet different—an incorruptible body; yet conscious of its *identity* with the very body that lived and moved upon the face of the earth. "I know," said the afflicted, disease-consumed, yet ever-living Patriarch*—"I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that He shall

* "Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." John xi. 21.

stand on the latter day upon the earth, and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh * shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold and not another though my reins be consumed within me."† Gloomy and horrifying as the grave is to the unrenewed, earth-loving sinner, it has no terrors to the Christian. It is to him a bed of peaceful rest till the morning of eternal day dawn upon its darkness; and he lays his toil-worn body down in its holy silence, trusting to God, that the "same power which raised up Jesus from the dead," shall raise it up to glory, honor and immortality.

It is through Christ alone, that this life-giving, sanctifying power, has been imparted to corrupted humanity. Had man never sinned he would never have felt death. His life would have been a perennial spring. But scripture and experience testify that he has fallen from holiness, and incurred the penalty of transgression—death. In the fading leaf and stormy blast that strips it from the tree, we have only an emblem of man's death-doomed condition, and a token of the fearful wrath of an offended God. Had man continued sinlesss, he would have been deathless, at least till the whole material system of which he formed a part, would be dissolved. The fading leaf and drooping flowers, would then have presented no befitting similitude of his condition. Death would have had no power over him. It was sin that brought death into the world, and armed him with power to

* "Yet in my flesh," that is personally.

† Job. xxx. 25–27.

lay man in the grave. There he would have forever kept him imprisoned, had his power not been destroyed by the Captain of our Salvation. Had sinful man been permitted to live an appointed time upon the earth, no fruits of holiness would have been matured. And, when at length he went down into the dust, no returning spring would have revived his mouldering body. "But though in Adam all die, so in Christ all shall be made alive." He is the "resurrection and the life." "If he died and rose again, so them that sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." No more can the grave forever entomb them, than it could hold the Lord of life. He entered it, and rent it asunder. Through the chasm, the light of life streams upon the earth—and the echo of the song that is ever new finds a passage to the heart—and a fresh impulse is given to the heaven-ward aspirations of the renewed soul. The humble Christian who has his faith firmly fixed on his Redeemer, "would not live here always." As his days draw to a close he rejoices in the hope of everlasting life through Christ; with this hope he encourages his soul, as he enters the dark valley of the shadow of death. In the consciousness of "that peace that passeth all understanding," a peace which reconciliation with God can only give, even here, amidst the sorrows of the world and the increasing infirmities of age, he has a foretaste of the streams of delight that flow from the throne of God and the Lamb, and of the pleasures that are forevermore.

The work of the Lord has its reward, even here below, but its full reward and enjoyment is hereafter, in that land of life and light, which lies on the other

side of time. To this view of the Christian life, we are also naturally directed by the falling leaf—but the consideration of this part of our subject, we will reserve for another discourse, together with the practical observations, which a general review of the whole may suggest.

But, my dear friends! in closing this discourse, let me earnestly entreat you to receive into "honest and good hearts," the lessons of Christian activity and perseverance, and of the shortness and value of time, that the season of the falling leaf inculcates. Life was given us for the most important purposes. It was originally given us to find happiness in communion with God. When we had forfeited this privilege, it was prolonged, by virtue of a New Covenant made with Christ, man's representative, and surety—that we might know God in him, and that by union with Him, through faith, we might have life eternal. The period of our sojourning on earth, is therefore a period of trial and improvement—a period of preparation through the sanctifying blood and Spirit of Christ, for eternal communion with God in a better world. If this preparation is not accomplished in time, we must forever remain under the sentence of God's law, and soon will the shades of death terminate our probation. "The night cometh, when no man can work." "Whatsoever thy hand, therefore, findeth to do, do it with all thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest." Under these circumstances, how importunate are the calls, "Give heed to the things of your peace, whilst it is called to-day with you—give all diligence to make your

calling and election sure—lay hold on eternal life." O, brethren! let these words pierce your ears, and find a lodgment in your hearts, and stir you up to a life-long struggle for your soul's salvation. They are addressed to the youngest among you—to the strongest and most healthful—aye, and to the tottering and infirm; for he only, "who endureth to the end, shall be saved." Let me assure you, brethren! that true anticipations of Heaven's blessedness, and a meetness for its enjoyment, do not—like Jonah's gourd—spring up in a night. They are fruits that must be cultivated with much anxiety and toil—they must be matured by the influences of Heaven—they must be rooted deep in the heart. It is after long patiently waiting for the fruits of the earth, that the husbandman at length gathers them with thankfulness, and bears them home with joy. So it is after unwearied diligence and care, and living in the habitual expectation of heaven's blessedness, that the hope of the Christian is realized. Brethren! what is your practice? What is your experience? Are you struggling with the corruption of your hearts? Are you striving to perfect holiness in the fear of God? Do you earnestly in prayer, seek the enlightening, guiding, strengthening, sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit, and under such culture of the heart, do you find the fruits of righteousness growing apace, and ripening in your soul? Have you already an inward experimental sense that God is with you, and that He shall be your "sure portion forever!" Then, "hold on your way rejoicing;" "let no man take from you, your crown." "Be thou faithful unto death,

and I will give you a crown of life." "Wherefore, having these promises, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know your labour shall not be in vain in the Lord." Amen!

SERMON III.

Isaiah lxiv, 6.—"We all do fade as a leaf."

These words not only suggest to the Christian's mind a train of reflections on the short tenure of sublunary life—on its duties, and its cares—on the termination in the grave, of all its joys, its sorrows and pursuits, but they also carry his thoughts onward beyond the scenes of desolation and decay which surround him, to the land of life, in which, they "who shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead, cannot die any more, for they are equal unto the angels, and are the children of God."

Brethren! were our views bounded by the verge of time—were our hopes buried forever in the grave, "man would be vanity, less than nothing, and vanity." We might then say unto God, "Surely, Thou hast made all men in vain." No where are we more solemnly impressed with human weakness, than when contemplating the decay of nature, and are listening seriously to the lessons which the fast dropping leaves silently teach to dying men. "In reason's ear," they seem to become vocal; and addressing the thoughtless multitudes that are in hard pursuit of the phantoms of earth,

they, as it were, say: 'Check for a moment your mad career—approach this "new made grave"—come, behold the ground where ye must shortly lie—come, ye proud, contemplate the closing scene of earthly grandeur in the rottenness of the tomb—come, ye "lovers of pleasure, more than lovers of God," behold how all the noise and gaiety of your revelries will be hushed in the dark and narrow house, where worms and corruption dwell—come, ye votaries of ambition, to whose unbounded desires, the wide world seems too little a possession, behold what a small portion of it will be your inheritance at last—come, ye thoughtless ones, who look not beyond the passing moment, who never think that any change will pass upon your fair forms—look here!—look into this lonely, loveless mansion, and "see to what condition you must come at last." Here, all earthly distinctions cease. Here, all ranks are reduced to the same level. Here, the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. Here, the prisoners rest together, they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are here, and the slave is free from his master. Look here!—amongst the crumbling remains of former generations, your own undistinguished dust shall lie, and here shall terminate your fairest hopes and fondest expectations.'

O! it is a sad and melancholy sound, that the records of time utter in the ears of dying men—of men, who live only for this world. But it is like sweet music to him whose home is in heaven, and who has his eyes directed to his Redeemer, as his advocate with the righteous Judge of all the earth. Like the evening bell which calls home the weary labourer from his

drudging task, it calls the Christian home from the cares and troubles of mortal life, and from being harassed with the sins and temptations of a wicked world. It calls him to peaceful repose, and the enjoyment of that happiness which emanates from the presence of the Lord of life. We therefore remark:

5th. That the season of the falling leaf is a season of religious hope.

When the leaves are stripped from the trees, and the horrors of winter begin to pervade the earth, we look forward to the return of spring, with as perfect confidence of its approach as if we had the actual experience of it. It is thus with the Christian, in reference to his spiritual existence. He is as confident "that when Christ, who is his life, shall appear, then shall he also appear with him in glory," as if he already participated in the "fulness of joy which is at God's right hand." Even when the grave is at his feet, and borne down with the weight of years and sorrows, he is about to sink into its silence;—when he looks upon the crumbling fragments of humanity that are thickly scattered around its mouth;—when he beholds the "King of Terrors," standing on its brink, panoplied for the last conflict;—when he sees youth and beauty; wisdom, strength, and excellence, all laid prostrate at the feet of "the last enemy," who thus, as it were, appears to be triumphing over his spoils;—when he feels, that he himself is about to become his victim; —that his icy breath has already frozen his life's-blood, and that his arm is uplifted to lay him low—aye, even then,—when he looks into the narrow house where his bed is to be;—when he looks upon the ghastly spectre,

whose hand is stretched out to wrap his body in its silence, and darkness,—he quails not. The grave is the "path of life;" he enters it without fear. Its darkness is dispelled by "the light of life," from the source of immortality. Its silence is broken by the Conqueror of death, whose triumphant voice penetrates to its deepest shades, and thus proclaims the law of life, to its death-bound dwellers. "Thy dead men shall live; together with My dead body shall they arise. Awake! and sing ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast forth her dead.—I will ransom them from the power of the grave. I will redeem them from death. O death! I will be thy plagues! O grave I will be thy destruction!—I am the resurrection and the life; whosoever believeth on me shall never die; yea, though he were dead, yet shall he live." When this voice is heard in the dying Christian's soul, the scenes of desolation vanish—the memorials of death disappear—a new prospect opens—already the mouldering fragments of humanity appear to the eye of faith, to be gathering together in their dark and narrow house—and to be rising up a mighty army of spiritual and incorruptible bodies. Already the sweet intercourse of long separated friends seems to be renewed, now hallowed by the love of the Saviour, who redeemed them, and purified them from all imperfection and sin. While thus, in firm faith, and Christian hope, the dying Saint looks forward to the prospect of dwelling forever in the immediate presence of his Saviour and his God, and with those whom he loved on earth, and whom he will continue to love in heaven, with divine affection, he is more than a conqueror.

Even when the consciousness that his dust shall mingle with its kindred dust, assures him that he is done with this world forever, and that all that belongs exclusively to the present ecomony of being is ended, he raises the song of triumph: O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory? Thanks be unto God, who hath given me the victory, through the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is indeed true, that in the breaking up of the frame of mortal nature, in circumstances that are painful and appalling, we can only see a display of the wrath of an offended God. We can look upon the grave, only, as the prison house of death-doomed transgressors, and in its perpetual silence and corruption, we see but the fearful evidence of the bitterness of the curse. But when the truth, "that corruption shall put on incorruption, and that mortal shall put on immortality;" is entertained with firm faith, and Christian hope; we also behold the effects of that wrath transformed into the means of conveying the highest possible blessings to the fallen, and impregnating the seeds of corruption and death with eternal life. The Lord of life came into this death-doomed world to give to it life, and to give it more abundantly, that is, to give it in a nobler form, and a purer essence than could possibly be enjoyed by man in his original state of innocence. He came to impart to the soul, "the life of God." To this end He died and rose and revived, that He might be Lord, both of the dead and the living. He entered the dominions of Death, to deprive him of his power. He laid his body in the dust and rose again, that they who sleep in him might rise with him. He

revived, that they for whom he died might revive to the conscious energy of life. It is the completion of this process that is going on in the grave. We have little knowledge of it, because, we have not had the actual experience of what it is, and being of a nature altogether different from any thing we are acquainted with, no power of language can convey to our minds right conceptions of it. We are guided to our conclusions, by the analogies of nature, with which the obscure intimations of God's word, all harmonize—obscure—not from any thing essentially incomprehensible in them, but because of the darkness and narrowness of our own minds, which cannot admit all the truth. Both nature and revelation intimate this much, clearly enough; that death is not a suspension either of the physical or mental powers of humanity—that there is no interruption in the processes by which their respective attributes are fully developed, and fitted for contemplating God in the unveiled blaze of his glory. This much we have clearly enough made known to us, that the soul sleeps not when it is separated from the body. "The dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Many considerations lead us to believe that it goes into the immediate presence of Jesus, the Meditator of the covenant of life, revealed in heaven to the "Spirits of just men made perfect" in his "glorious body"—that body of celestial brightness, in which once, and once only, he appeared on the earth; and that was when two of the glorified souls in heaven appeared with him upon the Mount, "and talked with him of the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem."

"Lord Jesus receive my Spirit," said the first dying Martyr as he looked up into the opened heavens and saw the Son of man standing at the right hand of God. "To-day thou shalt be with me in Paradise," said our Lord himself to the penitent thief on the cross. And the Apostle of the Gentiles affirms that "While we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord," and expresses his anxious desire to be "absent from the body and present with the Lord" —and that even while he is willing to remain on earth in the performance of his Lord's work, and in the enjoyment of his love, he had a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Yes! into the presence of the Redeemer, clothed in glorified humanity, and in the exercise of all that tenderness of compassion, and gentleness of love, which bound to Him on earth the hearts of his followers, does the believing Spirit go, to be guided by him through the vast regions of observation and thought which shall open on its far-seeing, emancipated view—and to be taught by him all the mystery of that economy, which links in love and family relation, the vast assembly of holy intelligence—God, the Father of all,—and all who have sprung from his creative hand and who have been penetrated with his love in Christ, and suffused with his glory, standing in his presence as his beloved children.

Nor is there any interruption, or pause, in the process by which the perfection of man's *physical* nature is evolved. There is a cessation, it is true, of the functions of organized matter. The body is laid in the dust; it is cold, motionless, insensible to all that is

going on around it, in the stirring noisy world; but it is not unsusceptible of the transforming, quickening power of God. It is silently, and unseen to us, and in a way which we cannot comprehend, undergoing in the grave, the changes through which its higher spiritual and immortal nature shall be finally evolved. "It is sown a natural body, it shall be raised a spiritual body." It is in the season of germination. It is acquiring the rudiments of a new life. It is being prepared for expanding its enlarged and renovated powers in the light and breath of heaven. It is being fitted with properties corresponding to the higher improvement which the soul has also acquired, during their separation, and adapted to the harmonious exercise of their functions, in that sphere where their re-united energies will be employed in the service of the "Eternal King." The very dust of his people is dear unto Jesus. As he raised his own body from the grave, so will he rescue their's from the power of corruption, and clothe them with life and immortality. "For we look for the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, from heaven, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his own glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself." It is this changing process that is going on in the grave—the reconstructing for a higher sphere of existence, the material elements of humanity. When raised up a "spiritual and an immortal body," it will be in all its essential properties the same—it will have lost none of its original elements—it will have only left behind it in the dust, its deathsomeness, and susceptibility of suffering, which were mere ad-

juncts, not the condition of its being—adjuncts, which sin had appended to its earthly organization.

Amidst the scenes of apparent decay and death which surround us, it is cheering to reflect, that it is the "FRIEND OF SINNERS"—"Jesus Christ the same to-day, yesterday, and for ever," who appointeth and conducteth every change, so as to work out his own gracious plans for the consummation of human happiness. Whatsoever may be the agencies he employs,—whether he works in sunshine or in storm,—by death or by life—he is, in a way inscrutable to us, effecting his own benevolent ends. Whether we humbly and confidently rest on the declaration of his own blessed word, or in the laudable exercise of our faculties, we attempt to trace the analogies of vegetable and animal life,—the similitude of the life of man to the leaf that fades and falls,—our thoughts are guided onward to that future state of existence which is intimately connected with, and but the consummation of the present.

It is no less delightful and consolatory to "turn away our eyes from viewing vanity," to contemplate the scenes of unsullied purity and unmingled happiness, on which the "ransomed of the Lord" shall enter, "when, they shall be presented before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy." It is true, we can form but very indistinct conceptions of the scenes and services of heaven. The eye hath not seen—the ear hath not heard—nor hath the heart conceived what God hath reserved for those who love and fear him. "The fulness of joy" lies within the veil. Into that sacred shrine, where Jehovah's presence is immediately manifested, and the light of his countenance is shed di-

rectly on his worshippers, in the present state of human progress, we are not permitted to enter. But we have a hope of eternal blessedness founded on the promise and oath of God,—a hope that enters within the veil,—which, like an anchor gives se curity and confidence to the soul, amidst the tossings and tempests to which it is exposed. But we have more—we have not only the assurance that there is joy in heaven, even to an extent far beyond what in our present condition we have either faculties to comprehend, or capacities to enjoy, and the confident hope, that we shall ultimately possess this blessedness if we be faithful followers of Christ—but we have also some express images, or reflections, of the objects and occupations of the invisible world. Shadowy and dim, —as they must necessarily be, in this land of shadows and darkness,—yet they enable us to form some conceptions of "the heavenly glory." Within that veil, impenetrable by human eye "the forerunner hath entered for us, even Jesus." In that fulness of compassion, and infinite depth of love, in which he presents himself there, as their Mediator and Intercessor, he is spiritually present with every one of his faithful followers on earth. He promised to be with them "always even to the end of the world," and "never to leave them nor forsake them." With the same freedom of intercourse, which distinguished his visits to the holy family at Bethany, and which was the delightful privilege of his immediate disciples to enjoy, may believers now enter into communion with Him, and experience the joy-giving influences of his presence. It is the emotions which we feel,—when in deep heart-communion with

him, He speaks to us of God—of God's love—of God's grace—of God's mightiest work, the redemption of a lost world—of life and immortality:—and it is the sentiments of love, gratitude, and veneration, which we cherish towards him; when we contemplate him, divested of his glory, dying for our offences, and at the same time, with the might and majesty of God, extending forgiveness, and giving life to guilty dying sinners—it is these emotions and these affections; that constitute the truest types of the happiness experienced in the presence of Heaven's Eternal King. And it is just as we know God in Christ, and in proportion to the intensity of our devout affections, that we will be able to conceive clearly of the divine attributes, going forth in one concentrated flood of glory and beneficence for the happiness of mankind, when no ignorance shall cloud their views, and no sin shall lead to error.

Sustained by these hopes the Christian is borne above the troubles and disappointments of life. He looks forward with a fearless eye, and an undismayed heart, to the closing scenes of his earthly pilgrimage. And conscious, that the same gracious power which has supported and guided him, through the various stages of his being, till the last and final one on earth, will watch over him in the gloom and silence of the grave, and cause the temporary disunion of his physical and spiritual natures, to contribute to the maturing of his faculties, and the advancement of his nature to a higher condition of purity and happiness—he looks forward with rapturous hope to the enjoyment of unmingled, enduring happiness, in the presence of his God.

Let this hope animate you, my brethren! Let it have that fixed hold of your hearts, that will cause you to yield yourselves submissively, to all the appointments of God. "Remembering how short our time is, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear." Let the objects of sense be pursued as their *chief good*, by men who would make this world their home. Let your treasure be in Heaven—your home on high. As pilgrims through the valley of tears, keep your eyes steadily fixed on the Sion above—the City that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Let it be the joy of your hearts, that every dispensation is wisely arranged for advancing you on your heavenly journey, and terminating your earthly toils. Since the grave shall be the common receptacle for the high and the low, for the rich and the poor, and all that peculiarly belongs to the earth shall be dissolved with the body, why should we contend for the honors, and struggle for the possessions of this world, as if these things were everlasting, and the happiness resulting from them, was commensurate to our immortal desires! Why! O why, should we disturb the dream of mortal life, with the strifes and crimes of uncontroled and misdirected ambition! Why should we imbitter the cup of enjoyment, mingled as it is with many unavoidable sorrows, with the poisonous infusion of hateful passions! When we think how brief our being is here below—when we think how insecure the possession is, of our most precious earthly blessings,—when we think how little all that we value in the world will avail us in the hour of death—surely, there is nothing to bind our affections to the earth, or to engage our

energies in the feverish pursuits of time.—There is nothing to inspire pride, or infuse into our breasts haughty contempt for any of our fellow mortals. Whatever may be the distinctions of this life, we are all brethren of a common nature, and the same destiny awaits us all. Amidst so many proofs as we have of our frailty, O let us be humble. Amidst the accumulating evidences of the rapid flight of time, let us be earnest, active, persevering, in cultivating the qualities of a godly nature, so that our fruit may be unto holiness, and the end, everlasting life! Let the winds as they whistle around us, and carry on their wings the faded leaves, admonish us, that we shall in like manner be taken away—and as we look forth on the gathering gloom of the approaching winter, learn, that the gloom of the shadow of death will soon fall upon us, and our eternal destiny be irrevocably sealed. Happy will they be who have the fruits of faith and holiness gathered home, and laying their weary bodies in the dust, rest in the blessed hope that through the sufferings and death of the Redeemer, they shall be raised to glory, honor and immortality.

Brethren! are you possessed of this confidence of hope? Could you, if death presented itself suddenly before you, fearlessly say: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand?" Would there be no sinking of heart—no shrinking back from the grave, as from some dark and unexplored region, full of the most hideous objects, instead of entering it with joyful alacrity, as on a new economy of being, where all the powers and faculties of your nature shall be matured and perfected? Ah! some of

you may say,—'Why disturb our dream of happiness, by such untimely questions as these? We have life before us, and time to gather in the fruits of holiness.' And some may say—'We have health and strength still, though we have passed the hey-day of life, and we will yet be able to accomplish all that is required of us, before we go hence.' Brethren! we have already reminded you, that death's harvest is in every season,—that he plucks the flower as well as the fruit—that he gathers the unripe as well as the mellow. The youngest among you may precede the most aged. At the utmost, none of you can stay in this world long.

First, of all, then, permit me, my young friends, to admonish you, that your career may be far shorter than you anticipate—yet, however brief it may be, your eternal destiny will be determined in it. "Be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer." Beware, that the spring-tide of your days be not blighted with the bitterness of eternal death. Even should your days be many on the earth, you have no time for idleness. Every season has its appropriate work, and the business to be done in the spring-time of life, is most important. It cannot be neglected. You must open up your young hearts to the influences of heaven. You must, by the appointed means of grace, implant, and carefully cultivate the seeds of holiness. Allow the heart to lie idle, and the most noxious vices and passions will over-run it. Allow your moral and religious sentiments to remain uncultivated, and what will be the issue?—death—eternal death! O! then, there is not a moment to be lost. The seasons quickly pass. You now look with delight upon the face of nature,

and every object appears to you arrayed in all the charms of novelty and beauty; but they are so evanescent, that scarcely will you have opened your eyes upon them, when they will have all vanished. As night succeeds morning,—as summer and winter, seed-time and harvest, follow each other with rapid steps, so will hoary age and decrepitude succeed gay and vigorous youth. "If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many." Before the evil days come upon you, acquaint yourselves with God. "Remember your Creater and Redeemer in the days of your youth." Bear in mind your condition as sinners—sinners doomed to death, who may yet obtain pardon—as mortal creatures, who may yet obtain immortal felicity. Begin early to seek the renovation of your nature, and an inheritance in Heaven. Let holiness and virtue, be your end and aim. Let the joys of your youth, be pure as streams from the rock. Remember, that to the scenes that attract your attention, and to the pursuits that now call forth your energies, you will hereafter turn your eyes for consolation. O! in mercy to yourselves, do not cloud the days, when pains and diseases will multiply, with the gloomier torments of remorse. Lay not waste the fields of reflection, and sweet remembrances, in which your souls may expatiate with delight, when you cannot enter into the joys and pursuits of the busy world. Poison not the cup of which you must drink, when passion, nor sinful pleasure cannot any longer sweeten the draught. Cultivate those qualities of youth, which will make age lovely. Pursue those pleasures now,

which will minister to your happiness hereafter. Store up the fruits of faith and holiness, which will refresh and console you when nothing else can. You may find some pleasure now in riotous scenes of blasphemy and intemperance, but there is a time coming when nothing will give peace to your mind but the consciousness, that He who died on the cross to save sinners, has washed you from sin in his own blood, and (in gratitude for what he has done for you,) that, "from your youth up, you have feared the Lord, and served Him."

Secondly.—Permit me also to remind you, who are now in the vigour of manhood—who are immersed in the cares and hurried along by the passions of life—of what God, and your own soul, demand from you. You now enter on the pursuits of life, with all the powers and faculties both of body and mind expanded and matured. Nothing, seems too hard for you to perform. No application of thought, seems to exhaust you. No bodily labour, to fatigue you. Like the rich foliage of summer, you seem to give shelter and shade to the feeble and unprotected. For the discharge of the duties that are peculiar to the season through which you are passing, nature seems to have fitted you with quickness of perception, and nobleness of aim—with strength, and a capacity of endurance that will surmount all difficulties. But, forget not, brethren! that "one thing is needful,"—the salvation of your souls; and that in the accomplishment of this work, you must put forth all the energy and strength of matured and well cultivated minds. Do not for a moment suppose, that the current of sinful propensities may be

changed without an effort on your part—that the wicked heart can be renewed, and a "right spirit created within us," without the most vigorous resistance to subtle and powerful enemies, and the most faithful application of the means of grace—that the affections can be raised from the dust on which you tread, and fixed steadily on the crown of glory which the righteous Judge shall give to all who shall have kept the faith, without the most unwearied struggles and persevering contests. O! do not for a moment suppose, then, that the most important work given you to do, can with safety be left undone until the feebleness of age comes upon you, and "the grasshopper shall be a burden." It surely is not then, a befitting time to begin that which requires the vigour of youth, and the strength of manhood, to perform—to sow the seeds of immortality, when death is ready to lay all desolate, and destroy utterly every hope. And O, forget not, that your work, all-important and difficult as it is, must be completed within a very brief period. You have already advanced one step nearer your final destiny. The spring-tide of your days has ended. How short does it appear, now that it is past and gone! The summer, on which you have entered, will appear to you shorter still. The freshness and elasticity of youth have already departed. Strength still nerves your arm, and manly grace, and generous aim may distinguish your conduct, but you are fast declining into the "yellow leaf." Death is rapidly approaching, to terminate all the plans and projects of this earth, and with them, too, will be ended all the means of grace, and every opportunity of becoming wise unto salvation. Breth-

ren! is your work finished? Have you, by a living faith, laid hold on Christ Jesus as the Lord your righteousness? Do you shelter yourselves from the wrath to come beneath the shadow of His cross? Do you feel that a holy change is passing on the whole current of your thoughts and feelings? If you have spent the vigour of your days in the service of God, and by the influences of the Holy Spirit on the appointed means of salvation, you have acquired that "holiness, without which no man can see the Lord," you need not fear evil. You are safe in every condition, and through every change. All nature may decay,—death may bring your body to the dust, but clinging to Him who is the "Rock of ages," you may cast an untroubled eye over the desolations of nature, and the ravages of death.

But if you have not secured an interest in Christ, your condition is lamentable. Soon will your summer be ended, and how terrible will be the prospect before you, if you are not saved! No longer a season for growth in grace left you—and yet, no fruit gathered for futurity! Your sins still unrepented! Your guilt unpardoned! Means that have been unemployed—opportunities that have been left unimproved, passing fast away from you! The claims of a righteous law binding upon you—the decision of a just Judge before you! What can you hope for?—What can you expect? "The wicked shall be driven away in his wickedness. They shall be turned into hell, and all the people who forget God"—"for God out of Christ is a consuming fire." These are terrible denunciations; but there is no avoiding the destiny they announce—

it is the penalty of the immutable law of heaven. With such a doom impending you—your summer nearly past, and you not saved!—are you still unconcerned about your condition? Are you still devoted to the sinful pleasures of this fleeting world? Are you still without God in this world, and without fear for the next? What infatuation! What folly! There is something awfully alarming in the warning language of the Prophet:* "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved."—Something that should appal the heart of the most reckless sinner, and impel him to "the mercy seat," penitently to sue for pardon, if yet it may be found. The harvest past, and no fruit unto holiness gathered, whatever else may be gathered. The summer ended—the season of growing perfection—the season of means and opportunities—the genial season of divine influences—the season of matured judgment, strength and experience, ended! All gone!—never more to return, and we are not saved! Not saved from death—not saved from the unutterable torments of the lake that burneth with fire—not saved from the wrath of God! Tremendous condition! What a situation for a man to be in. Brethren! open your ears—open your hearts to the warning voice of God's servant. Let his words stir you up to the earnest, anxious inquiry, "What must I do to be saved?" Let them lead you to the Saviour, for "it may be that he will have mercy upon you." Your hope of acceptance may be feeble, but there is no other hope left for you—yet that hope, (increasing in splendour with every hour's experience

* Jeremiah, viii.

of redeeming love) you may have. Your sun is still shining high in the heavens. The shades of the evening may be gathering fast, but the night has not yet come, when no man can work. If till now you have neglected your salvation, be more earnest. If in folly, you have reduced the time for labour, to the shortest space—try to redeem what has passed, by being more earnest and active in time to come. Keep close to Him, who, out of his fulness will give you grace upon grace. Learn of Him who was meek and lowly—who was beneficient and kind. Following Him in life, you will follow Him through the valley of the shadow of death, into the regions of everlasting life and light.

Lastly.—Some of you have entered into the vale of years. With you the harvest is passed, the summer is ended, and the autumn has drawn to a close. There has been much in our preceding remarks to alarm you, if, on looking back upon the seasons of grace that are past and gone, you must in truth say, "and we are not saved"—but there is much also to comfort and support you under the load of years, if, looking back on the past, you can sincerely say: 'Amidst many short-comings, and aberrations from the path of duty, I have endeavoured from my youth up to fear God and serve him.' Yet permit me specially to address a few words of warning and encouragement to you also. Your condition is indeed most interesting. We are disposed to pity the aged and infirm, shut out in a great measure, as they are, from life and its enjoyments. But were we to view your condition without any bias from the predilections of an earlier age—and without any taint of earthlyness, surely we might rather be

disposed to congratulate you. You are, it is true, like the wan leaf that trembles in the breeze, and will soon drop unto the ground. Infirmities are beginning to bend you to the dust, as if you were there looking for a place to rest, from the ailments incident to your frail condition. Your sinking sun casts the shadow of death across your path. The grave is at your feet. Soon shall your tottering steps slide into it—and its dust shall cover you. This would be a melancholy prospect if your views were circumscribed by time. But it is a joyous one, to the Christian who looks far beyond it—who looks to the grave only as a bed of rest, for a brief period, until the wise and gracious plans of his Heavenly Father are accomplished on the earth. He knows that he shall not forever sleep in its bosom.—He knows that he shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth from the darkness of the tomb, to live forever in the brightness of his countenance. The burdens of earth lie heavy upon him, but "his redemption draweth nigh." He is patiently waiting his Deliverer. The frailties of age, and its deadness to the world's pleasures—which in the heyday of life we commiserate—are the sources of a purer joy than ever gladdened the soul, when "corn and wine did abound," for they are to him the friendly monitors, that his light and momentary afflictions are nearly ended, and an exceeding and eternal weight of glory about to crown his labours.

Nor is old age without its enjoyments. Youth has its hopes and prospects; Manhood has its wishes and gratifications; Age has all these; and when life has been spent in the service of God, they are of a far higher

order. The "fruits of the righteousness," love, faith, hope, peace, have all been matured under the influences of God's Word and Spirit. They have been gathered home with thanksgiving and joy. They now yield the purest gratification. God is found to be gracious. His promise, to withhold no good thing from them who walk uprightly, is amply realized. There is already in the renewed soul,—even amidst the ailments and infirmities of mortal nature—an experience of the blessedness of heaven. And the visioned happiness of former days recur to the memory, to enhance the purer, loftier, spiritual enjoyments, that are crowded into the closing scenes of man's earthly history.

Brethren! you, who are standing on the utmost verge of time, and are about to pass into the eternal world—it is my desire to hope that this is your experience. I will not even venture to imagine the dreadful alternative, so full of woe, remorse, despair. Yet if it so be—if it be that any one of you, by imprudence and guilt, have deprived yourselves of the consolations which dispel the gloom of age—which disarm death—which disperse the horrors of the grave—which support the soul when dark waters would overwhelm it; O! turn your eyes to the hand stretched out to rescue you. We dare not limit the power, the mercy, or the grace of God. You may have lost all—all comfort—all peace—all but hope. That is still yours; if you will appropriate it. Until God calls you from this life, He continues to offer you life eternal. This is the privilege of your being. In the agonies of death, the penitent thief found mercy and pardon. O! there is little here, (if rightly considered,) to

encourage procrastination, but there is much to exclude despair. In your sore agony, turn your eyes to Gethsemane. Let your heart, overshadowed by "a horror of great darkness," and riven as if by an earthquake, turn to the more awful scenes of Calvary. When in the anguish of your soul, you cry, 'For me there is no mercy—no hope—God hath forsaken me'—listen to the dying cry of the Son of God, and dare not distrust that love that was so wonderfully displayed—dare not controvert that declaration of pardon to every penitent sinner, so emphatically proclaimed. Is the agony of Gethsemane—the sufferings of Calvary—the horrible darkness of the cross, insufficient to expiate your sins? Is the love, that meekly, patiently, willingly bore all this, that you might live, to be quenched by your guilt, and ingratitude?—tremendous as that is!—Will you impiously dare, in the face of all this, to give the lie unto God?—like the impenitent thief in the very moment of death! You have but a moment for decision—the happiness or misery of eternity is in the issue!

But, weary pilgrim of Sion! it is another scene that opens to your view. Your dim eyes are scarcely sensible to the things of time—but an inward light—a ray from the eternal throne, reveals to you the things that are unseen to mortal eye, as objects real, glorious, enduring. Your ears have become deaf to the din of the world—even the soft tones of affection hardly penetrate them, but on the inward sense, the sweeter tones of the song that is ever new, are already heard. Long have you been driven by the winds, and battered by the rains of a tempestuous world—your toils are ended—your never ceasing happiness is begun

—the peace and joy which fill your hearts; are earnests of the far higher, unspeakable blessings in store for you. Kept by Almighty power till the consummation of all things, you shall rise to newness of life, and be as trees planted in the garden of the Lord, whose leaves fade never.

That these consolations in death may be yours, my brethren—that eternal blessedness may be the portion of every one of you—live as you ought to live. Cleave unto Christ—cherish the influences of His Holy Spirit, without which your labour will be in vain, and your harvest fruitless. Let the rolling seasons teach you the wisdom that cometh from above. In the various changes of the year, hear God's voice, telling you of your duties and your destiny. Interpret the voice of nature, by the voice of inspiration. Without this, it will be uttered in vain—it will have no life, no spirit. Let God's word therefore be a lamp to your feet, and guiding your steps by its holy light, may you escape the snares and temptations of the world, and reach in safety the rest that remaineth for the people of God. —And when the fruits of God's heritage are gathered home, may you be bound, with his redeemed ones, in the "bundle of life."—Amen.